



## **DADS' CONNECTION PROGRAM – EVALUATION RESULTS**

Professionals working in the area of domestic violence acknowledge that, although there are a number of programs available to support and treat women and children who are victims of domestic violence, there are few services available to men who are abusers. It is also recognized that many of these men still have an active role in the lives of their children. By failing to offer support and treatment to the perpetrator, we place a greater burden on the mothers and children. In order to break the cycle of violence, men, as well as women and children, need appropriate support, intervention and treatment.

Aisling Discoveries started delivering the Dads' Connection Program in May of 2007. Dads' Connection is a group intervention program for men who have abused their partners who also have access to their children. It is a psycho-educational group for fathers with the aim of imparting information on the effects of domestic violence on children. The goals of the 15-week program were to enable fathers to:

- Realize the impact of and take responsibility for their actions/behaviours.
- Rebuild trust with their children (primarily) but also with their partners/spouses.
- Break the cycle of violence or abusive behaviour patterns by sharing skills and strategies to deal with communication barriers.

Dads' Connection was developed with the understanding that ultimately the child is the client. Content of the sessions included discussions, videos, readings and exercises on themes such as: Examining your own Fathering and Upbringing; Child Centred Fathering; Knowing your Child; Listening to Children; Barriers to Effective Communication; Relationship Building Challenges; Feelings, Thoughts and Actions; Power, Control and Partner Abuse; Rebuilding Trust and Healing; The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children; Accountability & Taking Responsibility; Talking to Children about Violence; and Positive Discipline.

### **Program Evaluation**

An evaluation was conducted consisting of participant surveys and/or feedback interviews. The purpose of the evaluation was twofold:

- 1) For the pilot stage (the first two groups): to determine what was working and what could be improved.
- 2) For all groups: to determine whether participants were benefitting from the program.

Participants: To date, six groups have been run, with a total of 35 men completing the program. Across the six groups, 34 participants filled out surveys, which represents a 97% response rate. Also, fifteen men were interviewed for this evaluation.

## **Results**

Participants believed that the content of the group was relevant to their situation. They also felt that the resources used during sessions and the weekly homework assignments were helpful to them.

In terms of benefits, the group clearly met its goal of teaching fathers the impact of exposure to domestic violence on children. Participants of the group learned a lot about child development and definitely felt that the group helped them to parent more effectively. The fathers also strongly believed that their relationship with their child(ren) had improved as a result of attending Dads' Connection. To a lesser degree, participants thought that their relationship with their child(ren)'s mother had improved.

Although the fathers initially attended the group to meet an expectation of Child Welfare, in the end, the participants overwhelmingly stated that the group was beneficial, and that they would recommend the group to someone else.

## **Conclusion**

The program evaluation clearly showed that the Dads' Connection Group enabled fathers to realize the impact that witnessing domestic violence has on their children. By focusing on how to become a better father, participants were more motivated to take responsibility for their actions/behaviours. Participants admitted that they not only learned a great deal from the group and became better fathers, but that they actually enjoyed the weekly meetings.

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